

New Standards for Cleaner Watercraft

Q: Is the Air Resources Board banning 2-stroke engines used for boats?

A: No, the Air Resources Board (ARB) has developed standards based on actual emission levels, regardless of engine type, for new outboard and personal watercraft engines. These standards do not ban two-stroke engines. The ARB's emission standards reflects currently available clean-burning engine technology.

Q: What types of watercraft are affected by ARB's regulations?

A: The regulations apply to gasoline-powered outboard engines, personal watercraft (for example, Jet Skis and Wave Runners) and jetboats only. Sterndrive and inboard engines are not included in ARB's regulations at this time, but are being studied for future emission reduction programs.

Q: Will I have to buy a new boat engine?

A: No. The regulations adopted by the ARB set exhaust emission standards for engines sold in California starting in 2001. The regulations do not require the retrofitting of pre-2001 model year engines, or require the purchase of new engines.

Q: Will I be able to sell my pre-2001 model year engine in California

A: Yes. There are no restrictions on the sale of pre-2001 model year engines. In addition, dealers may continue to sell trade-in engines and pre-2001 model year engines.

Q: Can I still use my boat on my favorite lake or river?

A: Several water agencies have recently restricted access to their lakes or reservoirs in order to protect or improve water quality. Specifically, Lake Tahoe, the East Bay Municipal Utility District and the Santa Clara Valley Water District have each adopted restrictions for their waterways because of concerns about gasoline constituents found in their waters. These actions have been taken on a lake-by-lake basis and have been local rather than statewide.

Q: What engines will be available that meet the new requirements?

A: Manufacturers have already introduced a variety of engines between 2 and 225 horsepower that comply with the new regulations. Several two-stroke direct injection engines have been available on the market. These engines offer consumers improved fuel economy, lower oil consumption, and improved idle performance while significantly reducing pollution and maintaining the performance characteristics of traditional two-strokes. Four-stroke engines are also available that comply with the new regulations. These have been available to consumers for many years and also offer improved fuel and oil economy. Soon the ARB will compile a Buyers Guide listing which engines meet the new standards. Look for the Watercraft Buyers Guide on our web site (www.arb.ca.gov) or call 1-800-END SMOG to receive a copy.

Q: What about MTBE emissions?

A: MTBE, methyl-tertiary-butyl-ether, is a gasoline additive used to reduce emissions from gasoline-powered engines. Similar to many other constituents of gasoline, such as benzene, MTBE may be hazardous to ingest, and therefore should be eliminated from drinking water supplies. Use of gasoline powered watercraft on reservoirs and lakes used for drinking water has been linked to measurable levels of MTBE in drinking water.

Q: Why doesn't the ARB just remove the requirement for MTBE in gasoline?

A: The ARB does not specify which oxygenate refiners must use to meet our cleaner-burning gasoline requirements. Refiners may meet the cleaner-burning gasoline specifications in a number of ways. These include the use of oxygenates like MTBE and ethanol, or the use of a complex computer model to design gasoline blends that do not use an oxygenate but that have the same emissions characteristics. However, the U.S. EPA requires the use of an oxygenate like MTBE or ethanol in gasoline sold in the smoggiest parts of the country, including the Los Angeles and Sacramento areas. The ARB supports federal efforts to allow California's gasoline program to supersede the federal program, allowing refiners to use formulations without an oxygenate.

Q: What about the label program?

A: The marine engine regulations require manufacturers to apply an environmental label to new outboard engines and personal watercraft. These labels clearly identify the emissions performance of new engines meeting the regulations. The intent of these labels is to help consumers choose clean technology engines when making a purchase decision. They also provide water agencies with a distinctive and standardized method for identifying clean technology engines should they need to restrict access to lakes or reservoirs in order to protect water quality.